



The 14<sup>th</sup> Congressional District Student  
Advisory Board's  
2010-2011 Report

# Education

Wednesday, June 8, 2011

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## ***Introduction***

Each generation has a distinction. There's been the "lost generation," the "silent generation," and the "baby boomers generation." However our generation has been deemed by many to be the first generation to be less educated than their parents. My fellow board members and I face this fact with mixed feelings. To us part of this claim seems untrue. Our board this year is made up of dedicated, hardworking students, as evidence of the report that follows, who will all without a doubt make a serious impact on the world during their life. Yet we are a rarity in the American school system. We have come from families that have made education a priority in our upbringing and have been lucky to able to attend some of the finest public and private institutions in the country. Nevertheless this does not shield us from the flaws in our nation's approach to education. We watch as the tenure system lays off brilliant teachers while passionless professors receive their paycheck instead. Enrichment programs like Art and P.E. are being slashed left and right and schools' resources deteriorate right before students' eyes. To this year's 14<sup>th</sup> Congressional District Student Advisory Board the problem was simple logic: you fix the education system, you fix everything else. How can we be expected to solve all the growing problems in our nation like the economic downturn, healthcare, and climate change if we are producing a generation of inadequately prepared leaders? We selected this topic not only because we know this needs to be fixed but also because we believe it can be fixed. Now I invite you to read on and my fellow board members will tell you how.

-- Emily Ryles, SAB Chair 2011

# Health

## ***Combating Childhood Obesity***

*Roshni Desai*

### **Background**

Strongly prevalent in adults and adolescents, and becoming rampant in the lives of many children, obesity is becoming the common trend seen throughout many elementary schools and high schools in the United States. In July of 2007, the Bush Administration took part in a public service announcement urging food companies to stress the importance of healthy eating and pacify the constant hounding from fast food companies. Public health advocates have identified childhood obesity as, "A serious and growing problem, with roughly 15 to 18 percent of children and teenagers considered overweight, according to government data." (Washington Post) The National Institutes for Health have determined that obesity and being overweight combined are the second leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Not only is obesity a costly problem for families who may have to seek treatment for escalating risks in their children's health, including diabetes and high blood pressure, but it is also a costly quandary for the country. The main benefactor of this problem is the meals that students receive at school, generally consisting of frozen food or foods containing high fructose corn syrup eventually become a taste addiction for many students. Congress has sought to address this issue through legislation, however progression toward this goal is moving very slowly.

### **The Problem**

Although many steps and programs have been implemented to reduce the rise in obesity, at the rate at which we are headed, obesity will become standard in American lives. In May 2010, the President's Task Force on Childhood Obesity released an action plan with recommendations to reduce childhood obesity prevalence from 17% to 5% by the year 2030. Although federal policies include supporting the best practices in community programs as well as continued monitoring of BMI by schools and health care providers, these policies are not directly targeted towards the affected areas, which are defined by race, ethnicity, geography and socioeconomic status. Obesity is highly dominant in certain minority groups such as African Americans and Latinos, where nearly 40% of the children are overweight or obese (Let's Move).

The latest program implemented by the government has been Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign targeted directly at combating childhood obesity. According to this campaign, the statistics were different thirty years ago; most people were able to lead lives that kept their health steady and people did not live a sedentary lifestyle. In the present day, children are not only inactive, but they eat an additional 200 calories a day. During adolescence, children spend an average of seven and a half hours a day using some sort of entertainment media, while not getting any form of physical exercise. The problem of obesity is worse for adolescents, as adolescent obesity can have consequences lasting into adulthood.

Youth who are overweight or obese now have a higher chance of developing cardiovascular disease or other health conditions such as, asthma, hepatic steatosis, sleep apnea and Type 2 Diabetes. Health problems are not the only issues youth face—social issues may arise if children are deemed “fat” or “obese.” They may be subject to social discrimination, which leads to long-term effects on self-esteem.

Not only is obesity a burden for youth and their families, but it is also a major financial problem for the country. Obesity can increase medical and disability costs and decreased work participation, which takes a toll on the entire country. Not only would the economy plummet due to preventable health concerns, but the work force could also be severely harmed.

### **The Solution**

Many beverage makers, food manufacturers and most recently, Walmart, the country's largest retailer, have promised to cut the levels of salt, fat and sugar in their products. In the state of Washington, a new child nutrition law also puts the state in charge of deciding what kinds of foods are sold during the school day. The 14<sup>th</sup> Congressional District's Funding for the Fiscal Year, 2010, showed that Congresswoman Eshoo and the district allocated \$231,400 to the Santa Clara Family Health Plan's Childhood Obesity Prevention and Education to fund low-income children who may have high risks of obesity through a comprehensive case management search. Clearly, this funding has not been addressed to the public eye and support from anonymous companies or people willing to address this issue has not been found either. By increasing the funding to this program and granting the help and support of other companies, this county can ensure that they are supporting and fighting the battle against obesity. If this issue continues in an uphill trend, most of the health budget will go in support of reducing obesity. We can start the downhill trend now.

By addressing physical activity in schools as a main goal for students, it is a low cost ordeal as well as a way to ensure that the requirements are being met. Secondly, instead of reaching for improvement as a nation, selective counties with high obesity rates should implement a health promotion program that will allow for a budget that can be used towards buying locally grown organic produce. Specifically in regards to the 14<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, the sustainable farm, Veggielution Community Farm, is a perfect option for schools to empower youth to not only eat healthy foods but consider the fact that their food came from a sustainable food system right in their backyards.

The Board proposes that the United States federal government support the ideas outlined above in order to provide for a reliable and financially friendly way to ensure that the trend in obesity soon plummets. Furthermore, imposing a federal tax on sodas and sugary drinks will make consumers think twice about buying these drinks. After a dozen states have adopted such taxes, this health reform will adversely affect the consumer's decisions on buying sodas and sugary drinks. Also, as previously mentioned, obesity screening is essential to helping obese people rearrange their eating habits. Many people suffer emotional stress when it comes to food, and not addressing the root cause of obesity can be stressful to the citizens as

well as the government. These two options are ideas that were presented firsthand to Congress, and have passed in some states. The best option for battling obesity would be to use these options that have been previously recognized and use the federal funds that are being distributed to different counties for health use as a means for the obesity screening. Although the money from the soda tax will not go directly to this program, it will go to pay for health care, which will reduce medical costs. This beverage tax proposal can help finance health care plans, and the money that is distributed to different states for health funding can be used for screening and physical education costs.

Congress has already passed another viable option that can be ensured by the United States government. Currently, the health care reform bill that has been passed mandates that health insurance companies have to cover the expenses of preventative medical treatments. This bill will be the main game to see if the country can forefront-tackling obesity. Unfortunately, the bill will not be implemented until the year, 2014.

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## ***School Lunches***

*Megan Costello*

### **Introduction**

In recent decades, the federal government has realized the importance of school lunch programs. In order to excel in school, children need to be well fed and energized. Congress established the National School Lunch Program in 1946 to provide free or low cost meals to public and non-profit schools. Since then, the program has been consistently expanded and improved. In 2009, it served more than 31 million children every day, which cost the federal government \$9.8 billion. And while children's immediate hunger needs are generally being met, the quality of the food in such programs is less than stellar given that only \$2.72 are allotted for each meal [1].

### **The Problem**

Since 1980, obesity rates among America's youth have tripled. There are now nine million children age six to eleven who are overweight [6]. This trend is unacceptable, and the education system has done little to address the problem. Due to low budgets, school boards have slashed funding to physical education, the sciences, and wellness classes. To make matters worse, vending machines litter the halls, making unhealthy foods saturated with high fructose corn syrup readily available to students. Many students in low income neighborhoods, where budget cuts are felt the hardest, have working parents who are not home at meal times to set a good example of healthy eating. The lack of access to healthy food and the lack of healthy eating examples are negatively impacting obesity rates in America.

### **The Solution**

Innovative administrative decisions can not only revolutionize the school lunch program but also strengthen the curriculum. Leading the pack in such innovation is Our School at Blair Grocery (OSGB), an independent school established in the lower ninth ward of New Orleans following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Its simple goal is to end hunger in New Orleans. The concept behind OSGB is that students run and maintain a small organic farm and sell the produce to their community. Not only are the students able to access real, healthy food, but also they learn science in the garden and important mathematics and leadership skills in the marketplace. For its innovative teaching methods, OSGB was featured on 2010's "Best of Democratic Education" list [2].

The Board recognizes that OSGB is a small alternative school that does not accurately portray most educational experiences in America. However, some schools within the 14<sup>th</sup> Congressional District have begun to implement the ideas of OSGB and provide a viable alternative for schools across America. The non-profit Collective Roots worked with the East Palo Alto Charter School (EPACS) to create a one-acre flagship garden. Because EPACS grows much of its own produce, it does not need to rely heavily on external school lunch programs. Instead, the children are able to incorporate fresh, organic produce into their diets at a very low cost since the school only pays for the seeds [3].

All 264 students in 5-K classes work in the garden year round while they exercise and learn about science, health, and nutrition. In middle school, the children also learn about issues of food access and justice, which ties into their social studies classes [3]. For example, the students might learn that America has lost 75 percent of its topsoil [5] and the only connection between every single failed great civilization in history is the depletion of topsoil [4]. Then, the students could begin a letter writing campaign to their state governments to advocate for sustainable agriculture regulation and learn about the American political system in the process.

While the garden provides alternative teaching styles and cheaply reintroduces courses that are often stripped from the budget back into the curriculum, it also revolutionizes home life. EPACS has a policy requiring parents to be involved at the school. As they work in the garden with their children, parents are also educated about the importance at healthy eating. Many of them continue the dialogue about nutrition with their children at home, and many realize that they too can create a small garden in their backyard [3].

The Board proposes that Congresswoman Eshoo introduce legislation that provides federal money taken from the Farm Bill for school gardens in low neighborhoods. This initiative will reinvigorate America's weak school systems and tackle rising obesity rates. The investment will also reduce the cost of the National School Lunch program and save the federal government money in the long run.

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## ***Guidance Counseling***

*Amy Chang*

### **Background**

Guidance counseling in America started during social reform movement of the 1890s, when people sought vocational guidance to help themselves conquer difficulties of society. However, over the course of time, the profession was expanded to not only include vocational but also social and personal aspects of the students' lives.

Counselors serve to assist in making decisions as well as facilitating communication to provide a better learning environment for students. They are able to enhance students' school experience with vocational information and emotional support, more than what academic teachers provide. However, many schools overlook the importance of these guidance counselors, and combined with severe budget cuts, are forced to condense and stack an overwhelming amount of work onto this position. Nowadays, counselors typically take on multiple tasks such as overseeing testing programs, lunch duty, attendance monitoring, and substitute teaching. (i)

### **Problem**

During the last few decades, with the rising number of students who pursue postsecondary education, and an increasingly competitive economy demanding college diplomas, the structure of guidance counseling in schools has not been able to keep up. (i) Over 80 percent of jobs that in the next 10 years will require postsecondary education, yet only 36% of all 18-24 year olds are currently enrolled in postsecondary education. (i) Surveys show that in schools which offer professional guidance, young adults give their counselors rather low reviews. In 2010, around 6 out of 10 students rated their counselors either poor or merely fair. (i) In addition, numerous states do not have school counseling mandates for schools, causing many students to not have access to professional assistance.

Another important task of counselors is to provide emotional support. One in five children and adolescents will experience a significant mental health problem during their school years. (i) School counselors are positioned as professionals best able to make a difference, being able to consistently and frequently provide direct services to students and parents. (i) Students are more likely to seek counseling when services are available in schools. (i)

Yet the blame should not be placed on the counselors, since school systems assume that counselors can take on various duties while still effectively assist hundreds of students. The American School Counselor Association recommends a student-counselor ratio of 250 to 1, (i) but very few schools can meet the recommendation. (i) In fact, the national average is around 457 to 1, with some schools upward of one thousand. Providing quality counselor services requires that schools have an adequate amount of appropriately trained professionals. (i)

## Solution

Legislation should be made to appropriate funding toward school counselors. In 2010, the Put School Counselors Where They're Needed Act(i) was introduced to provide funding for high schools with high drop-out rates. However, this issue needs to be further addressed in the long run, thus legislation should be made to continue this effort.

With the nation's current budget, a simpler strategy can be adopted temporarily. A wide range of institutions, community groups, professional unions and philanthropic organizations have already been established and are dedicated to helping students. Encouraging partnerships between schools and counseling organizations is a good way to start using the resources that are already present. Furthermore, legislation granting tax deduction of donations for this cause can effectively encourage further development. This way, students are able to find adults who are trained for guidance while also relieving the burden and workload on their school counselors.

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## ***Underage Drinking and Drug Abuse are not Indestructible***

*Erika Cagampan*

### **Background**

Underage drinking and drug abuse has long been linked to adolescents for many decades. Underage drinking is the illegal consumption of any alcoholic beverages by teenagers, or anyone under the age of twenty-one. Alcohol, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is the “most commonly abused drug by youth in the United States” despite possible repercussions and clear disobedience of the law.<sup>1</sup> An estimated 10.8 million teenagers aged 12 to 20 are current drinkers. Similarly, drug usage among anyone is illegal and prohibited, yet prominent in various areas of the United States.

Some associate this risky and illegal behavior by teenagers to numerous rationales. During puberty, the myelin region of the brain, responsible for decision-making, occurs last during this time of mental and physical growth spurt. Thus, teenagers scientifically have a natural tendency to be impulsive and risky, regardless of the law and other basis of rules. An individual’s background, lifestyle and amount of stress also play a larger role in their decision making. Many connect bad decisions, such as underage drinking and drug abuse, to familial and peer influences.<sup>2</sup>

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), administered by the government, has increased funding towards elementary and high school education on underage drinking and drug abuse. For example, the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) further advocates for a safe and drug-free learning environment. This increase in underage drinking and drug abuse education is aimed to bring awareness the many negative implications, especially on health, to teenagers. Thus, gradual decrease of these illicit deeds will suffice.

### **Problem**

Each state is required to collect data in every high school through anonymous student and teacher surveys about alcohol and drug consumption. Despite this problem continually being addressed and awareness are being raised, these surveys state that in specific parts of the nation, the percentage of teenagers involved in underage drinking and drug abuse is rising. For instance, in 2008 the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) reported “26.4% of youth aged 12 to 20 years drink alcohol and 17.4% binge drink. In 2009, the latest NSDUH results state that 27.2% of the same age group chose to illegally drink and 18.1% binge drink.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the rate of illicit drug users between the ages 12 to 17 increased during that same time interval. In 2008, a reported 9.3% of youth in the United States illegally used drugs while in 2009, a reported increase to 10% of youth anonymously admitted to usage of illicit drugs. The reported increases in percentages may seem neither large nor significant; however, it is troubling that these numbers are on the rise despite increased programs and education on illicit drugs and alcohol.

There are countless negative consequences of underage drinking, a majority of which are closely related to individuals’ very own health. The consumption of

alcohol and drugs at a relatively young age results in reduced efficiency in mental processes such as schoolwork, memory absorption, and social participation. Physically, the dire consequences are present during hangover and illnesses, disruption of normal growth and marring of brain development. Emotionally, teenagers who choose to drink and do drugs have a higher risk for suicide and violent acts.<sup>5</sup> Though drug and alcohol abuse educational programs that raise awareness towards these negative health impacts are currently being utilized in secondary schools all over the nation, many teenagers still continually partake in these illicit activities.

## **Conclusion**

It is apparent that an increased funding for drug and alcohol abuse educational programs in elementary and secondary schools is not sufficient to decrease the rates of underage drinking and drug abuse by teenagers as evidenced by the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), taken by each unified school district in California. 57% of high schoolers in my own school district, the Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD), have engaged in underage drinking and 31% in illicit marijuana last 2009-2010 school year.<sup>6</sup> However, surveys show two years prior, the percentages were lower. Surveys, counselors, and educational programs such as a required Living Skills class and Health Fairs are in place in my school district, as are in many districts in the 14<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. Nonetheless, these are not effective at lowering the number of teenagers who drink and do drugs, but rather, increase the numbers as seen on the surveys.

Current educational programs such as the ESEA, Initiative on Underage Drinking and Drug Abuse Resistance Education Program, all of which are governmentally funded, should certainly continue. However, the Board suggests that new and innovative programs that give a fresh outlook on this ongoing problem be in place. One way to do so is through early prevention in younger grades such as fifth and sixth. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) have developed special materials that raise awareness within 10-12 year olds and their parents. If this problem is addressed earlier, there is a lesser likelihood of an individual suffering from drug and alcohol abuse during later teenage years. SAMHSA also directly supports Teach-Ins in these fifth or sixth grade classrooms, providing current statistics and information and technical support. However, only 1,300 schools out of hundreds of thousands of elementary and secondary schools in the United States have been consistently granted support for Teach-ins in the last five years.<sup>6</sup> More schools should unquestionably be supported by programs such as SAMHSA in order to successfully inaugurate early prevention of drug and alcohol abuse.

Another solution would be to utilize the surveys taken and targeting mainly the counties and areas of the nation with the largest underage drinking and drug abuse percentages. By focusing on the worst cases, a better knowledge on the programs that succeeded and failed in ameliorating their situations will ensue. This garnered knowledge can then be used in other areas suffering the same extremity of the problem. Greater funding in these specific areas can provide necessary professional development and intervention, conflict resolution programs and

educational materials on the negative consequences of their illicit actions. Furthermore, this will work to create a healthier, more substance and drug-free community.

Through early prevention and early education of alcohol and drug abuse, efficient operation of programs in more necessitated and affected areas of the United States, and programs that allow direct collaboration with the families of these teenagers and the community as a whole, the direction of this impending problem can change. Students and parents of these students will be adequately equipped and educated to control alcohol and drug consumption by the time they reach their adolescent years. This will create a well-informed community on the negative consequences and health implications that create a need to stop this impending problem.

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# Curriculum

## ***Curriculum – Monitoring and Reporting***

*Thomas Reidy*

### **Background**

Based on my personal experience and observation, I believe that our public school system is inadequate in two very important areas: math and verbal communications. For Example, my 8<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher started the year off by telling the class that she hated teaching pre-algebra. This careless attitude set up the students for failure by devaluing the class. Students are not going to be enthusiastic about something if the person teaching them the material isn't either. Also, students were rarely given the opportunity to gain experience in areas of debate and argumentation, because there was no focus on students developing and defending their ideas.

It was experiences like these that drove me to suggest change. I began researching what was being done to improve the core curriculum in both math and verbal communication. In the course of my research, I discovered that the California State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State's Standards (CCSS) in August of 2010 that aims to provide students a stronger foundation in verbal and mathematical skills early on in a student's career. Upon reading this legislation I was excited to see that part of our government was taking positive steps toward developing more confident and resilient students in our nation, but this leads toward a secondary problem.

### **Problem**

While encouraged by the changes, this is just the first step. Each state has its own ways of helping students learn, but the overall systems are fragmented and not interconnected. While this program is in good theory, the question remains of how affective it is overall. Many issues with evaluating the program arise. We know that not all students are able to understand some concepts as well as other students. Not all children learn the same way. There have been many different contributing factors known to have an affect on a student's ability to learn such as: age when learning the material, socioeconomic backgrounds, and learning disabilities. These challenges need to be accounted for to be able to measure the progress of students and adjust the evolving curriculum accordingly.

### **Solution**

Curriculum is an ongoing, state ran process that needs to be updated constantly. Therefore states need to have a national system that allows students to learn the most effective way for them. There needs to be a robust and flexible plan for implementaion, monitoring the states' progress and reporting feedback so that the curriculum can be adjusted to insure its overall effectiveness and appropriateness for varying ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and learning disabilities. In order to have an effect on all students, we need to have people who

are constantly monitoring the progress of students on a state level through testing and surveying and then reporting that progress to the Department of Education in order to make specific and necessary changes to the overall curriculum.

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# Immigration

## ***Family Deportation***

*Ines Lizaur*

### **Background**

Currently, it is estimated that there are more than 12 million illegal immigrants in the United States and 3 million in California alone. While the parents of families may be in the US illegally, their children are often US citizens. Four million children who are American citizens have one parent who could be deported under current law. 5-18 year old children of these illegal immigrants are entitled to take advantage of the California school system. Even though San Francisco is over 450 miles away from a hotbed of illegal immigration along the California-Mexico border in Tijuana, the impact of the immigration is prevalent in this area. Almost every public school throughout California's 14<sup>th</sup> Congressional District has seen issues regarding illegal immigration, whether they impact students, the faculty or members of the staff. As stated in the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment, "all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside". The varied interpretations of this clause have caused much unrest and disagreement – should the children of illegal immigrants be included in this amendment? Under current law, children of illegal immigrants born in the US and between the ages of 5 and 18 are American citizens, meaning they are entitled to a public school education.

### **Problem**

When parents are deported, their children have two options – they can leave with their parents or enter the US foster system and try to continue their education. There have been various cases in the past couple years in the 14th Congressional District where popular families, integrated into their communities have been deported – their children often following close behind. Even as the communities protest and argue on behalf of these families, rarely, if ever, are exceptions made. Children who have never stepped foot in their supposed country of origin are shipped back to a rural, unfamiliar community. To these kids, the Bay Area is their home. Due to some parts of the 1965 Immigration Act, these children of illegal immigrants are often referred to as "anchor babies". This stereotype was developed because under the act, children born within the US could eventually allow their guardian to attain permanent US residency. Yet, as many know today, the process is far from simple; when the mother of a US citizen applies to get a visa, it requires action by the child, much paperwork and long waiting periods.

In late February of 2007, a Palo Alto family was faced with a decision. The Ramirez-Aguirre family has four children, all of whom are legal US citizens. The parents, Pedro and Isabel had almost reached the 20-year benchmark on years spent working in the United States. The parents entrusted a San Francisco attorney to renew their paperwork and help them apply for a green card. This attorney took the family's money and did not tell them their inevitable fate of deportation after they lost the deportation hearing. "Officials at Gunn High School, Terman Middle

School and Barron Park Elementary school [stepped] in. Teachers, staff and some parents purchased groceries, shuttled the students from home to class and paid for an attorney to look at reopening the parents' deportation case." Isabel Aguirre did not have enough money to get plane tickets for the rest of her family when hearing of her deportation, but after much fundraising by the community, she finally raised enough money for the travel tickets. Even though her children were US citizens, they chose to move to Mexico with their family. They will not be able to take advantage of the great Palo Alto public school system. It is uncertain whether these kids will continue their education and graduate from high school.

When children are forced back to unfamiliar, "home" bases, they are rarely able to finish schooling, as they would have in the US. In particular, in Mexico, children who move back rarely have the resources or money to enroll in higher levels of education. "Some Mexican schools only go to sixth grade, and money for further education is often required." After moving, US citizen children question their identity and feel trapped between their American persona and the Mexican stereotype inflicted upon them. One source notes that kids born in the US who move to Mexico are viewed as "second class citizens because of their status as American Natives".

Illegal immigration is extremely prevalent in the 14<sup>th</sup> congressional district; public schools around the area see both illegal students as well as legal students with illegal families. The public schools have had to deal with the deportation of families, and supporting the families during their moves – as legal US-born children pack up their belongings on their way to moving to a nation with fewer education opportunities.

The US citizens who are children of illegal immigrants should be able to take advantage of the US school system. In order for them to continue schooling and succeed, both job-wise and emotionally within the US, it is crucial that they are not torn away from their parents and family. Families must stay together. To achieve this, parents of US born citizens should be given leniency and time.

## **Solution**

Legal children of illegal immigrants, between the ages of 5 and 18, have the right to attend state funded California schools.

If the legal children are in the US school system and the parents are supporting their children, the illegal parents should not instantly be deported. These parents should be given leniency. They should be allowed to spend up to one year in the US before deportation. In this time frame, the parents can support their children and find alternative support mechanisms for their children if necessary after their deportation. The parents will have time to think about the future of their children. In this one-year grace period, the government or other organizations can monitor the family as to ensure they do not flee. Yet even when monitored, families disappearing is a large question and uncertainty. By providing parents with this one-year period, this reform will hopefully help solve the issue of children being pulled away to rural cities with little to no opportunities in education.

Illegal immigrants with legal children who have worked in the United States for ten or more years and don't have a criminal record or a record of bankruptcy

should be eligible for American citizenship. These individuals are contributing to their communities, and have already been in the nation for an extended period of time.

Finally, regarding the illegal children of illegal parents enrolled in the 14<sup>th</sup> congressional district's school system; they should be given a one-month grace period before the family is deported. In this time, the family will be able to settle some of their affairs and get organized. Even one month will contribute to the children not being so disrupted, with regard to schooling, friends and family life.

I propose the installation of grace periods when dealing with deportation of illegal immigrants with minor children in the public schools. These predetermined time allotments allow time and space for the parents of the citizen children to plan and develop a strategy that will best benefit their children. Often times, these few months make the difference between children being forced to leave the US after their parents are deported, and children being able to stay in the country, finish school, and many times lead more successful lives.

In late March of 2011 Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez of Illinois announced his tour of over twenty cities for his "Campaign for American Children and Families". He is focusing on documenting and interviewing citizens whose lives have changed and families have been split because of deportation. The congressman's strategy of sharing the personal stories of individuals is extremely powerful. These stories and experiences are valuable in informing those of the 14<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of this problem. I propose that Congresswoman Eshoo continue involvement in Gutierrez's tour and strive toward similar immigration reform goals. I also propose Eshoo's involvement in the Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM), like Gutierrez. The movement focuses on meeting with the president and other powerful figures to use their power for positive change. It also reveals personal stories of families affected by deportation. Gutierrez's main message is that immigration reforms are necessary. He encourages stopping the "needless" deportation of parents and spouses of those supporting, working or contributing to the US before reforms are achieved. The family members eligible under the DREAM act should not immediately be deported. The US government should first focus on removing the criminals and those not contributing or in some way tied to society.

Congresswoman Eshoo should send petitions to President Obama to stop the immediate and unjust deportations until progressive reform occurs. The president, with his administrative powers, could provide relief to certain groups facing deportation.

There are many variables when considering immigration reform. The first is the length of the grace periods. These time periods would serve to let the parents get organized and plan a strategy to allow their children to stay in the US, with support. The periods need to be long enough to make sure they serve their purpose but short so that the risk of the families disappearing is low. Tied to the length of the grace periods, how does one prevent the participants of this reform program from fleeing? Surveillance and check-ins may not be enough to prevent them from running away. Finally, there need to be requirements for involvement in this leniency program. To reduce risks, the illegal parents interested in getting involved

could potentially get a US citizen to sponsor them. The parents should also have no criminal record and not constantly be moving around.

Grace periods and leniency are crucial when dealing with the deportation of illegal immigrants and the splitting up of families. US citizen children between the ages of 5 and 18 are entitled to public school education. For children of illegal immigrants to be able to take advantage of opportunities and schooling in the 14<sup>th</sup> district, immigration reform needs to happen.

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## ***The DREAM Act***

*Sarah Khasrovi*

The inevitable limitations that come with being an immigrant in the United States are gradually worsening, inundating the lives of youth in America. Children of immigrants are denied access to the basic fundamentals that American-born students have, especially in the case of education. The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act is a bill that targets youth who have grown up and attended high schools in the United States, yet whose future is inhibited by the current immigration laws. U.S. law presently causes these young people to essentially inherit their immigration status from their parents. The DREAM Act will grant opportunity to qualified applicants and ensure that immigrant youth are rewarded for their hard work and perseverance in academic fields.

The DREAM act should be implemented in our government to enhance not only the prospects of hardworking immigrant students, but also to grant diversity and culture to our school systems. As a current high school student, I can certainly attest to the fact that an eclectic mix of individuals allows me to possess an informed perspective and ultimately allows me to walk away from the classroom having learned more. Born and raised in the United States, the American youth have the notion of “Equality” and a figurative “Land of Opportunity” engrained in their minds. In a society where we are consistently encouraged to reach our fullest potential through honest, hard work and perseverance, it seems essentially contradictory to inhibit such a pursuit. The highly accomplished young person being denied the chance to attend college could have led the way towards positive reformation or enterprise at any given point in our future. To deny fundamental educational rights to immigrant youth who have worked equally as hard as their native born counterparts is to corrode the basis of our nation.

While it is necessary to recognize the existence of potential problems and setbacks in the current wording of the bill, reform must accompany this acknowledgement. A common deterrent of the DREAM Act is the worry that it will threaten national security and border control. What we must emphasize however remains the idea that any illegal immigrant who does not meet the high prerequisite standard of the act will be unable to obtain aid. This assurance will bar the threat of potential criminals gaining access to unwarranted and unmerited assistance from the DREAM Act. We must make it clear that the bill solely supports the highest achieving of students, rewarding them for their dedication and initiative to develop and better our domestic community. By providing this means of respect and equality to our immigrant youth, we, as a nation, are maintaining our core values, while also improving our own diverse and collaborative society.

# Alternative Education

## ***The Key to Success: Preserving Student Opportunities to Career and Technical Education***

*Shannon Galvin*

### **Background**

At the Santa Clara County's Central County Occupational Center, Saratoga High student Dennis Rosenthal, who knows he wants to be a car engineer, spends the afternoon working in the auto shop--taking a car apart and putting it back together.

The Central County Occupational Center, or CCOC, offers courses within 12 industry sectors--ranging from veterinary assistant to fire science to culinary arts--as an alternative educational path for junior and senior high school students.<sup>i</sup> Students spend half-days on the CCOC campus and half-days at their home high schools for a semester or an entire school year. While the program is free to high school students, the classes are also open to adults for a fee.

The CCOC is just one example of the nationwide effort to expand to prepare students for the newly industrialized workplace. The federal role in "vocational" education originally began as a way to train high school students with a focus on a specific occupation skill set. However, over the years, the program has evolved to match the needs of growing market and expand its offerings both at the secondary and postsecondary level.

In 2006, the language "vocational and technical" was updated to "career and technical" education to reflect a fundamental change in philosophy of Career and Technical Education (CTE). (xiii) No longer is CTE just for students who were not going to college; instead, today it is a system that prepares students for both employment and postsecondary education.

With the integration of career and academic preparation, CTE ensures that students are taught the same rigorous and relevant content but with the same challenging academic standards as all other students. It also has contributed to the disappearing stigma of the separate "track" system of CTE.

In its current state, many CTE programs are organized into 16 Career Clusters, or similar occupation groupings, that identify a pathway for the knowledge and skills students need to reach a particular goal. (xiii) Once students choose the pathway they want to follow, the instruction can lead to a high school diploma, an industry-recognized credential, a certificate, or a college degree. The framework provides the foundation for a seamless transition to both the workplace and postsecondary education.

In California alone, approximately 1,554,611 secondary students participate in CTE programs, with 1,472,656 postsecondary students and 369,377 adults. (xiii) Nationwide, 96.6% of high school students take at least one vocational course, according to the 2004 NAVE Final Report. (xiii)

The federal government provides support for career and technical education through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of

2006 (Perkins IV; P.L. 109-270), passed by the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, which reauthorized and amended the Perkins Act of 1998. (xiii) The Perkins Act is the main source of specific federal funding for career and technical education.(xiii)

CTE has long adjusted to the constantly shifting needs of our economies and our communities. Today, it stands as part of the solution to a myriad of problems in the educational system and workplace, such as high school dropout rates, globalization, and a weakened economy.

## **Problem**

The most significant threat to Career and Technical Education comes from the recent announcement of the Fiscal Year 2012 budget, which proposes to cut the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins) to \$1 billion, a \$264 million loss.(xiii) Such a cut reverts the program back to its 1991 levels.(xiv) Additionally, the FY 2011 bill passed in the House of Representatives already cut the Tech Prep program from Perkins, amounting to a \$102.9 million loss in funding. Under the Administration's approval, some states will lose up to 38 percent of funding for career and technical education.(xiii)

During hard economic times, such measures are imprudent, according to the advocacy group Association for Career and Technical Education, when "Perkins is helping adults re-enter the job market and helping CTE students to outperform their peers."(xiii)

Career and Technical Education directly prepares students for a future in the workplace in a way regular postsecondary education cannot. College degrees are not necessary for many jobs. In fact, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, of the 30 jobs projected to grow at the fastest rate over the next decade in the United States, only seven typically require a bachelor's degree.(xiii) College retention rates are another major issue—for college students who ranked among the bottom quarter of their high school classes, 80% will probably never get a bachelor's degree or even a two-year associate's degree.(xiii)

Additionally, soaring high school drop out rates are a troubling concern for the occupational future of the next generation. Alarming, nearly one in every three students who start high school in the ninth grade fails to complete 12<sup>th</sup> grade within four years.(xiii) This means that literally millions of Americans will be ill equipped to face the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace and economy.

In an analysis of 11-20 year olds from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, researchers determined that the relationship between the quality of future job opportunities and violent delinquency begins "even earlier in the life course as individuals move through adolescence. When that future does not appear promising, adolescents are more likely to become disinterested in formal education and perhaps seek out alternative sources of status among peer cliques or possibly gangs."(xiii)

Career and technical education helps give such students a promising future. Without solid federal support for career and technical education initiatives, American students will not be ensured that they will be both college- and career-ready for the global economy.

## **Solution**

To protect the future of a skilled American workforce, the board recommends that Congresswoman Eshoo joins the bi-partisan Career and Technical Education Caucus to pledge her support of the importance of career and technical education in preparing a well-educated and skilled workforce in America. The board commends the Congresswoman on her membership as part of the House Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Education Caucus to ensure that all students have the educational opportunities to prepare themselves for the highly technical jobs of the future. However, the board urges that Congresswoman Eshoo augment this support by advocating the possibilities of career and technical education.

The board also recommends that Congress broadly invests in CTE programs through the Perkins Act and restores funding for the Perkins Basic State Grant and Tech Prep programs to \$1.264 billion total. With states already facing tight budget restraints for education, any cuts would prevent development and support of programs that train students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Perkins Act--and Career and Technical Education--has proven to work. Many of the youth employment and training programs that have been evaluated have been shown to have positive long-lasting effects on the subsequent employment and earnings of participants. (xiii) Students who participate in CTE programs are giving themselves a future in high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand professions. In a 2004 National Assessment of Vocational Education (NAVE) report, students who participated in postsecondary CTE coursework, even without earning credentials, earned a higher yearly salary than high school graduates who do not take postsecondary CTE courses.(xiii) A 2002 study conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago found that a year of technically orientated coursework at a community college increased the earnings of men by 14% and women by 29%.(xiii)

CTE programs also aid academic success. Students who take integrated academic and CTE programs also have been shown to have significantly higher student achievement in reading, mathematics, and science than do students at schools with less integrated programs.(xiii)

Career and educational training also directly addresses the alarming high school dropout rates that plague the United States. In a Gates Foundation Report, 81% of students who dropped out said that "more world learning" may have influenced them to stay in school.(xiii) In fact, a ratio of one CTE class for every two academic classes was shown to minimize the risk of students dropping out in a 2005 National Research Center for Career and Technical Education report.(xiii)

With the number of students enrolled in CTE programs rising--157% from 1999 to 2004 (xiii)--it is only increasingly important that Congress continues to support full funding for the Perkins Act.

Bill Gates stressed the importance of technical education in his March 2008 address at the U.S. House of Representatives Science and Technology Committee Hearing, "If the United States truly wants to secure its global leadership in technology innovation, we must, as a nation, commit to a strategy for innovation excellence... I believe this strategy must place top priority on achieving the fundamental goal of strengthening educational opportunities, so that America's



students and workers have the skills they need to succeed in the technology- and information-driven economy of tomorrow." (xiii)

In conclusion, this board strongly recommends that Congresswoman Eshoo embrace CTE programs at the high school and postsecondary levels in order to help students see the relevance of their work and prepare them for a bright future. With appropriate policy supports and funding, these CTE programs can help students leverage their academic and career skills to help build and sustain our economy.

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## ***For-Profit Institutions of Higher Education***

Alice Hau

### **Background**

The number of for-profit colleges is growing because community and state colleges can no longer meet the increasing demand for student admissions. However, for-profits are costing the government money that does not always support quality college education or future success for their graduates. To ensure equal opportunity for quality higher education and proper use of government funds, this report will recommend legislation to regulate for-profit colleges. Government oversight of these proprietary for-profit colleges is required to prevent student loan defaults, fraudulent recruiting practices, and post-college joblessness.

The number of students enrolled in for-profits has increased 236% in the past decade.<sup>1</sup> Enrollment is now close to over 3 million students.<sup>2</sup> California has drastically reduced community college budgets by hundreds of millions of dollars, forcing some colleges to eliminate courses and cap enrollment.<sup>3</sup> Supporters of for-profit colleges argue that because these schools must be competitive to succeed and net a profit, they are more responsive to parents' desires and students' needs.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, for-profit colleges are relatively new, and there have not been comprehensive studies by the government to assess their value accurately.<sup>5</sup> In addition, some believe that colleges driven by profit strive not to provide quality education, but rather to increase their revenues, by recruiting students who are eligible for federal loans.

### **Problem**

One of the major problems associated with for-profit colleges is the growing number of unpaid student debts. According to Education Trust, 97% of for-profit college students take out loans, versus 14% of community college students. Nearly half of those 97% account for all student loan defaults, according to the U.S. Department of Education.<sup>6</sup> Some for-profit colleges are not accredited. The degrees

<sup>1</sup> "The Broken Promises of For-Profit Colleges ." *The Education Trust West*. N.p., 02 Dec 2010. Web. 30 Mar 2011. <<http://edvocatewest.org/2010/12/02/the-broken-promises-of-for-profit-colleges/>>.

<sup>2</sup> "3 Million and Counting." *Inside Higher Ed*. N.p., 26 Aug 2010. Web. 30 Mar 2011. <<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/08/26/enroll>>.

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<sup>6</sup> Vasquez, Michael. "Affordable Higher Education In the News." *The Student PIRGS*. Miami Herald, 09 sep 2010. Web. 30 Mar 2011. <<http://www.studentpirgs.org/in-the-news/news/higher-ed/for-profit-schools-grow----as-do-complaints>>.

they offer are not valid, preventing students from transferring class credits and being recognized in their fields.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, students who earn invalid degrees have great difficulty finding jobs and are swamped in debt. Finally, some for-profit colleges recruit students under false pretenses; they may withhold information about program cost, student debt, and job-placement results.<sup>8</sup> These recruiting methods are often used to target minority and low-income students eligible for federal student aid. 80% of for-profit college revenues come from this federal aid.<sup>9</sup> Although some argue that for-profits provide opportunity for disadvantaged students, some for-profits are simply targeting students to increase profits. Solution:

To address this growing problem, Congress must pass a bill to regulate non-profit colleges and to heighten student awareness of possible frauds committed by some for-profit colleges. For-profit colleges must be forced to impart all information to students regarding debts, accreditation, and future success rate of graduates. The "Amendment to Block Oversight and Accountability for For-Profit Colleges" passed by the House on February 18, 2011 blocks the Department of Education from overseeing for-profit colleges.<sup>10</sup> It prevents the Department from regulating certain for-profit educational programs and restricting their access to Title IV federal funding.<sup>11</sup> Title IV funding provides student loans. Had the amendment not passed, criteria for access to Title IV funding for for-profits would have been based on student debt-to-earnings ratio, debt-to-discretionary income ratio, and loan repayment rate. The "Oversight and Accountability" measure showed potential to fix the problems of student debt and to increase career success of graduates, but the amendment to it allows these serious problems to continue unchecked.<sup>12</sup> The Amendment to Block Oversight Accountability for For-Profit Colleges must be changed. If for-profits lack oversight, loan default rates will only rise as the trend of increasing enrollment in for-profits continues. The aggressive and sometimes falsely informative recruiting strategies must also be addressed to protect students.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "Harkin Questions Accreditation and Oversight of For-Profit Colleges." *Tom Harkin: Iowa's Senator*. N.p., 10 Mar 2011. Web. 30 Mar 2011. <<http://harkin.senate.gov/press/release.cfm?i=331821>>.

<sup>8</sup> Quigley, Mike, and Dick Durbin. "Chicago Tribune: The Predatory Nature of Some For-Profit Colleges." *Chicago Tribune*. N.p., 30 Jul 2010. Web. 16 Mar 2011. <[http://quigley.house.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=359&Itemid=22](http://quigley.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=359&Itemid=22)>.

<sup>9</sup> Tyler Lewis, *Government Steps Up Scrutiny of For-Profit College Abuses*, May 9, 2011, <http://www.civilrights.org/archives/2011/05/1188-gainful.html> (accessed May 18, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Kirkham, Chris. "House Budget Amendment Targets Rules Seeking Accountability At For-Profit Colleges." *The Huffington Post*. N.p., 2 Feb 2011. Web. 16 Mar 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, Lauren. "For-profit college rules targeted." *Congress.org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Mar 2011.

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<sup>12</sup> Epstein, Jennifer. "Inside Higher Ed." *Closer Look at 'Gainful Employment'*. N.p., 26 Jul 2010. Web. 16 Mar 2011. <<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/07/26/regs>>.

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Congress needs to modify its amendment to require for-profit institutions to disclose information regarding debt repayment, graduate success, and their school's accreditation. Further, the amendment must provide oversight of the federal funding granted to for-profits. In doing so, congress can ensure that students have the best opportunities for higher education, and that 100% of the allocated government funds will effectively support that cause.

In a time when the demand for admissions to community and state colleges is so high, youth are deeply concerned about what options for higher learning remain available to them.

In light of the economic crisis and the high number of underserved, college-bound students, alternative forms of affordable higher education, such as for-profit colleges, fill an urgent, growing need.

However, for-profit colleges must be regulated to ensure they are viable, legitimate alternatives for students, not a drain on government funds. The board recommends legislation to force for-profit colleges to fully disclose information to their students regarding loan default rates, federal aid, tuition fees, and success of graduates.

## ***Students With Disabilities: We Are Leaving Children Behind***

*Julia Heimark*

### **Background**

“The promise that all children will achieve higher levels of academic performance is the foundation of the current educational reform movement.”<sup>ii</sup> As representatives of the Student Advisory Board, it is our responsibility to ensure the proper environment is in place to accomplish this goal. Unfortunately, we are failing to deliver this promise to students with disabilities. There has been no discernible change in the achievement level of students with disabilities since the passing of these acts.<sup>iii</sup>

### **Problem**

The second Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] of 2004 (original 1997) modified the No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB] of 2001 with an explicit goal: to improve the educational performances of students with disabilities. The IDEA and NCLB prescribe access to the general curriculum. This method is highly controversial and little research has been done to support the efficacy of this assumption.<sup>iv</sup>

Further, *IDEA* and *NCLB* suggest including students with disabilities in system-wide accountability. Unfortunately, this accomplishes the opposite of its intended effect: standards are lowered for students with disabilities, resulting in poor academic achievement and gains. Further, school funding is tied to achieving absolute academic progress goals in the general student body, such that schools are encouraged to “leave behind” students, like those with disabilities, and focus on students more likely to reach the required standards.<sup>14</sup>

### **Solution**

Holding students with disabilities to universal content standards is inconsistent with the generally accepted consensus and that individualization of education and progress goals is the best path to academic achievement for students with disabilities. Therefore, more generally, schools need a way to identify and be rewarded for growth in academic progress among disabled students. Such a solution may provide a mechanism to identify other at-risk classes of students, e.g. students from lower economic backgrounds, and further the education of particular sub-groups of the student population. There is currently a disincentive for schools to spend time to focus on these students. A less absolute, more goal-based structure of a portion (not the entirety) of federal education would encourage more creative programs targeted at specific student groups – this capability of targeting specific student groups is crucial because being “disabled” is such a broad term, referring to an abundance of different situations (physically disabled, autistic, down syndrome,

etc.). The most successful of these dynamic programs could then be identified and so would spread quite quickly to other school districts.

## **Conclusion**

More generally, our failure to help students with disabilities is a symptom of a larger problem: the lag between federal implementation and the ability to demonstrate efficacious advantage.v Students, especially those of classes with an increase risk of academic non-progress, deserve a system that can deliver changes to the classroom more quickly. The current structure of funding, tied to absolute goals with no room for relative assessment even around the periphery, is a roadblock to their success. Our attempt to leave no child behind is unfortunately the opposite for students with disabilities, to encourage schools to leave them behind and focus on students who are more likely to raise their absolute average. We owe students with disabilities and students from at-risk backgrounds a better system.

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## ***Homeschooling***

*Julia Sommer*

### **Background**

About 2 million students are homeschooled in the United States each year. (1) Homeschooling is a form of alternative education for students who are more successful outside of a conventional education in public or private schools. Parents choose to homeschool their children in order to specialize their child's education to meet the child's individual needs. Homeschooling allows for flexibility in a student's education, with respect to both curriculum and schedules, allowing parents to decide how and what to teach, based on the child's needs and the values of the parents. For some families, this choice allows the parents to focus on a student's particular need in a certain area in school. For other families, homeschooling allows parents to teach their children based on the teachings of their religion rather than the views of the public school system, set by the state's education standards. Homeschooling laws and regulation vary greatly from state to state. (1)

### **Problem**

Homeschooling allows much flexibility for the parents/teachers. While this flexibility is in large part the purpose of a homeschooling situation, it also raises issues about the legitimacy of the education. For example, homeschooled students, like private school students, do not take standardized tests to mark their progress or success in school and determine the effectiveness of their education. However, private schools are in a sense regulated by the families of the students who choose to pay for their children to attend. In this way, the private schools are checked even though the government does not impose standardized testing to monitor the school. On the other hand, no one regulates schooling in the home except for the parents who are the sole educators. Therefore, students schooled at home may complete their compulsory education far behind students who attended a public school. For example, students who are homeschooled for religious reasons only learn one side of each idea presented in schools, and these parents may focus more on religious teachings than on core subjects. The issue with homeschooling lies in finding a balance between supporting the parents and leaving them free to decide what is best for their children and regulating schools in the home to ensure that all youth in the United States receive the education that they are guaranteed. Although homeschooling is currently an issue addressed by the state and local governments, the federal government can act to protect the rights of students in all kinds of educational arrangements.

### **Solution**

Congress should require some regulation of homeschooling in all the states. Now, such regulation varies greatly from state to state. States like New York, Vermont, and North Dakota have high regulation of homeschooling, requiring parents to send notification or achievement test scores and some require curriculum approval by the state or teacher qualification of parents. Other states like Idaho, Michigan, and Texas require absolutely no contact between

homeschooling parents and the state government. Many other states have moderate regulation somewhere in between, including California. Individual states should be able to choose the level of regulation of homeschooling in their states, but Congress should require all states to regulate homeschooling.

Although advocates of homeschooling like the HSLDA (Home School Legal Defense Association) resist regulation because it infringes upon the rights of the parents to raise their children as they see fit, direct regulation of homeschools can ensure that all students in the nation have equal access to a adequate education. While testing is not the most flexible method of assessing a student's abilities, it is the only way to quantitatively measure a student's achievements. Therefore, states should impose simple tests to evaluate homeschooled students' mastery of basic state standards, including a literacy test to measure reading level. In order to make these tests satisfactory to those who advocate for the rights of homeschooling parents, we suggest that groups like HSLDA help the states format the tests and choose the material for testing. States can provide a variety of tests, and each homeschooling family chooses which test is most applicable to the material that they teach, to allow for more flexibility for the parents. If students cannot pass these tests assessing their basic knowledge and abilities in reading, writing, math, science, or other subjects, the parents must change their methods to bring their students to a passing level or else turn to more conventional methods of education. While the tests will not be designed to pressure homeschooling parents to "teach to the test," they will provide a basic level of assessment for schools regulated only by the authority of the parents.

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# Achievement Goals

## *Closing the International Achievement Gap*

*Ginny Maceda*

### **Background**

In the past two decades, the United States' standard of education has fallen in comparison with its previous high quality and the standards of other countries [1]. For the purpose of this paper, this disparity between the performance of students in the US and those in countries with better-ranked education systems will be called the "international achievement gap." As of late 2010, the United States ranked "average" in international education, despite having once been "top of the class" [2]. In the tri-yearly Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the United States was rated 14th in reading skills, 17th in science, and 25th in mathematics out of 34 nations analyzed. The study focuses on 15-year olds' performance in OECD member countries. In addition, the United States' high school graduation rate is among the lowest in the study and its percentage of 15 year-olds enrolled in school is even lower.

### **Problem**

Achievement rankings, while not the whole story, are a reliable metric that reflect abilities of United States students in comparison to their peers in other countries. For individuals, better test scores and performance in early school years correlate with higher high school graduation rates, college graduation rates and income [3]. A better caliber of education in earlier years therefore increase the ability of a person to support himself in later life. Yet, the longer United States students are in school, the worse they perform in comparison with students in other countries.

Education is not only important for each individual, but also for the nation as a whole. High performance in early education is indicative of increased "civic engagement" [3]; the longer a student has been in school, the more likely he is to vote. Furthermore, quality education of a nation's youth is key for the country to have a successful future. A country needs doctors, lawyers, professors, scientists, etc. to survive and thrive. In order to stay internationally competitive, the United States needs to be on the cutting edge of ideas and technology, spurred by a young generation that is both knowledgeable and innovative. In a global economy, the US must prepare its youth to be both qualified and competitive for jobs in the international market.

The achievement gap between the United States and countries with better standards of education also profoundly affects the United States economy. In a 2010 report analyzing the economic impact of United States achievement gaps, the prominent consulting firm McKinsey and Company concluded that if the United States education system were to be on par with those of higher-performing countries like Finland and North Korea, the country's 2008 GDP could have grown

by \$1.3 to 2.3 trillion [3]. Additionally, the United States government on average spends among the most money per student, yet these funds are not translating to high performance. Therefore this international achievement gap creates an additional gap - one between the potential worth of the United States economy and its actual worth. With so much money being lost, it is imperative that the government improve education not only for the sake of the youth but also for its own sake.

## **Solution**

The key to closing the international achievement gap and preventing the United States' standard of education from falling even lower is closing the US's national achievement gap. The PISA study proved that the countries with the highest ranked education systems had the smallest achievement gap within their own boundaries [2].

Thus the Board proposes to improve US education through three main methods: (1) eliminating evaluation by standardized tests alone, (2) better teacher standards and training, and (3) adopting national education standards. Assessment is particularly important because it "drives instruction" [4]; results from evaluations show what works in the system and what does not. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act's evaluation of school and student performance through standardized tests has caught many teachers in the trap of teaching students solely material and methods to do well on standardized tests. Such tests must not be the only metric that students are measured on by performance. Oral exams and written exams would prove useful to measuring students' analytical and reasoning abilities as well, and push teachers to not solely focus on the narrow scope of standardized multiple choice tests. In fact, PISA nations that outscored the US utilize oral and written tests and interviews to measure student performance [4].

Better teachers are key to higher student performance. In high PISA-ranking countries like Finland and Japan, only the most qualified and "highest-performing" individuals are recruited for teaching jobs [5]. Increased teacher training and collaborative workshops are thus necessary to better US education. Training and workshops should stress creative lesson plans to keep students interested and engaged and building strong teacher-student relationships to facilitate learning. Teachers should be regularly evaluated on student performance and class room relations. Class sizes should be kept on the smaller side, and if this is not possible, better teachers should teach the bigger classes. Furthermore, the teaching job does not have the same respected reputation in the United States as in other countries, and so work needs to be done to attract qualified candidates to the field. This includes slight pay raises (although the teaching salary in the United States is among the highest in the world, it is 40% lower than that of the average American college graduate), more benefits, and increased cooperation and negotiation with teachers unions.

The temptation of states to create low state education standards in hopes of having students easily meet expectations must be eliminated by adopting national education standards. Low state standards not only prohibit students from living up to their fullest potentials, but also perpetuate an achievement gap between states

and prevent the standard of US education from rising. Having national standards and general curricula also makes it easier for teachers across the nation to cooperate and collaborate on ideas, teaching styles, etc., thus benefiting from each others' experiences. National guidelines of performance in STEM fields is particularly important, as success in such areas are crucial for the U.S.'s economic sustainability and global competitiveness. Furthermore, setting a nation-wide standard for STEM fields is imperative for the United States to stay innovative and to rise back to the top in standards of global education.

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## ***Measuring Academic Achievement***

*Varsha Ramesh*

### **Background**

Methods of measuring student achievement have long been a challenge in the United States. The conflict between individual state standards and a national standard pose many problems in assessing the educational state of our nation. When the No Child Left Behind Act was introduced in 2001, a nationally standardized test was put into effect to measure the results of the act. The National Assessment of Education Progress, referred to as the NAEP, is the only standing nationally standardized test that is administered by the United States Department of Education. Until 1988, NAEP was purely descriptive. Starting in 1963, NAEP's conceptual father, Francis Keppel, and technical father, Ralph Tyler, wanted to create something different from a norm-referenced test on which about 50 percent of students answer most items correctly. On purpose, NAEP created items that the test designers figured few students would answer correctly along with items the creators thought most would answer correctly, as well as the usual items that about half the people would get right. In 1988, though, Congress created the National Assessment Governing Board and charged it with establishing standards. NAEP now became prescriptive, reporting not only what people *did* know but also laying claim to what they *should* know. The attempt to establish achievement levels in terms of the proportion of students at the basic, proficient and advanced levels failed. Since then, there have been numerous attempts to establish a fair method of measuring student achievement, but all efforts have been met with much controversy and opposition. Because state and school examinations are so subjective and varied, the leading educators of America disagree on the appropriate method of measuring student achievement.

### **Problem**

Student achievement cannot be measured by a test. Unfortunately, it also cannot be measured through any other means such as interviews, teacher evaluations, or school grades. On the other hand, it is imperative that some form of evaluating academic success exists; otherwise there is no way to analyze the situation. Right now, the NAEP merely tests basic reading and math skills; it does not begin to cover the topics it should. When evaluating students academic success, the United States Department of Education uses the data from this nationally standardized test to create "The Nation's Report Card". They further use this evaluation to address education for the following years. The board feels that this "report card" does not sufficiently assess the nation.

Even though it does test to national standards, the NAEP isn't even administered in half the schools in America. In 2007, only 140,000 students in America were tested, and not to mention, the test is only given to certain grade levels. Even though there isn't a huge growth in education in between the current testing years, the board strongly believes that every step matters to improve our education system. Critics of testing point out that it encourages inherent flaws: rote memorization, disinterest in school, dependency on multiple-choice answers. The

list is endless, but the conclusion is the same—reform is necessary. NAEP results do not mesh with those from international comparisons. In the 1995 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, or TIMSS, assessment, American 4th graders finished third among 26 participating nations in science, but the NAEP science results from the same year stated that only 31 percent of them were proficient or better.

### **Solution**

The board fully realizes that there will never be a perfect solution to this problem. There is no possible way a test can truly measure aptitude or academic success. On the other hand, the board acknowledges a dire need for a standard of academic achievement. The board proposes a revised national test that is administered to all students across the country. This test should not only incorporate the same questions as the existing NAEP but also include portions of free response. The board acknowledges that this process is time-consuming, but there is no alternative. Teachers fully support alternate methods of evaluation. Cate Dossetti, an English teacher at Fresno, Calif., High School, isn't alone in saying, "For me, student achievement means performing at levels which will prepare (students) for college and for the real world — it doesn't necessarily mean which band on the standardized test they're performing at," Thousands of teachers across the nation share the aforementioned belief. The findings are part of a wide-ranging survey, out today, of more than 40,000 USA teachers. Perhaps the largest ever, it's issued jointly by Scholastic, the children's publisher, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The teachers want change, and the government needs it. Without a new metric of student achievement, students in American will only continue to pale in comparison to international students. The board urges Congresswoman Eshoo to propose legislation to reform our "Nation's Report Card" and create a more accurate measurement of academic achievement in the United States.

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## ***The Language Barrier***

*Viraj Parmar*

### **Background**

Since the end of the Cold War, the world has entered an era of convergence where nations and individuals are increasingly interconnected in the political, economic, and social realms. In this globalized age, the impact of language as a single, unifying thread of the tapestry of humanity is indispensable. Indeed, Noam Chomsky has voiced the inextricable link between language and politics in the twenty-first century [1]. In this light, many governments the world over are implementing policies to foster language development—both native and foreign included—in education systems and to bring all students to equal advantage. For example, China recently announced a plan to completely revamp its bilingual program in education systems [2]. Meanwhile, in the United States, language is serving to fracture the youth demographic due to the language barrier in the American education system: numerous groups and communities have been denied access to the attention and funding needed to level the playing field with regard to language proficiency. This has resulted in a most detrimental widening of the achievement gap both within America and with respect to the international community.

### **Problem**

The language barrier in American education poses a two-fold threat: on one hand, it disallows lesser-assimilated groups from engaging with the educational institutions at the same level as those proficient in English; on the other hand, it prevents American from connecting itself with the rest of the world on an optimal level. To begin with the former issue: the Silicon Valley epitomizes the great diversity that shapes American society today. Minority groups such as Hispanics and Asians comprise a large portion of the population, especially in schools. Yet because these groups are not American by heritage, their English is not at an adequate level of proficiency for them to perform as well in schools. This has resulted in a yawning chasm between those who speak English as a first language and those who do not. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 [ESEA], which morphed into the No Child Left Behind legislation, declared that every student in public schools had the right to an education that would provide the skills and knowledge needed to become productive, contributing citizens [3]. The sheer lack of attention toward leveling the playing field for those not proficient in English contradicts this legislation, and it prevents the American youth from reaching their full collective potential.

The second part of this issue focuses on the language barrier in an international context. As it happens, learning foreign languages in a globalized world is fundamental for the success of the American youth, especially to narrow our achievement gap with foreign countries. The 2010 International Report Card, published by the OECD, found America to be ranked eleventh in reading and twenty-sixth in math, compared to other developed countries [4]. America's falling behind

in test scores represents the fundamental need for a comparative edge over other countries. Turning away from bilingual education is only exacerbating the situation.

### **Solution**

The Board suggests some key policy decisions to weaken the language barrier and thus eliminate the achievement gap both domestically and with respect to the rest of the world. The decisions Congress makes concerning these issues will have a momentous impact on our nation's future.

First, minority groups should be assisted with their English skills so they can perform better in the classroom. Granted, funding capability is low due to the budget crisis; however, we must seek to increase the role of non-profit organizations that can help this problem. For instance, the San Francisco Education Fund is a non-profit organization that encourages volunteers with teaching experience to assist many urgent needs of classrooms in San Francisco public schools. These sorts of institutions can be utilized toward ESL programs and providing mentors or tutors to students who need to improve their English to succeed in the classroom. Not only would this save a great deal of money, but it would foster a more healthy education for these students by integrating them into the community.

Second, more attention should be focused on bilingual education, which would eliminate the language barrier with the rest of the world. Encouraging foreign language programs as well as cultural enrichment programs would imbue the educational experience with a unique perspective. Furthermore, in an age where the dominance of the United States is being supplanted by the rise of other powers, investment in bilingual education would grant American students a competitive edge. Such an investment can be facilitated by creating more stringent foreign language requirements by both high schools as well as universities. Students in high school should be required to take four years of the same foreign language to ensure thorough dedication and appreciation that can be nurtured further later in life. Furthermore, high schools should be strongly encouraged to support an increased amount of cultural awareness groups, and to celebrate cultural diversity on campus. This way, the youth of America can achieve an invaluable international perspective that will eliminate the language barrier and fortify our nation's interests in the years to come.

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## ***Redefining Student Success***

*Samara Trilling*

At a time when the success of our nation's economy, international affairs, and well being as a whole depend so profoundly on the meaningful education of our students, student engagement and performance is faltering. Last year, 30 percent of students in America's public schools failed to finish high school with a diploma [6], and in 2001, 43 percent of degree-seeking college students fail to obtain a degree within six years [4]. We've entered an era when "students need to go beyond literacy, numeracy and content knowledge for success in today's complex, globally connected, competitive and interdependent world" [2].

Part of the reason is that our definition of success is outdated. Most of those in today's workforce will have 11 different jobs between the ages of 18 and 42 [3]. In addition, the level and scope of communication options today means that we have exponentially more opportunities to interact and engage with our democracy. It is easier than ever to only listen to opinions that match ours and harder than ever to discern correct information from incorrect. We are global citizens now – and it's understandable that we need to do some training and reevaluation.

Students graduating into the global marketplace in the next decade must be prepared for multiple career switches - which may entail learning new skill sets later in life – and increased involvement in "civic and community life that helps to create a better world" [2].

Perhaps even more convincingly, the recent film documentary "Race to Nowhere" conveyed how setting too much store in achieving traditional academic success can increase student stress to dangerous levels and prove detrimental to mental health. When we ask why 50% of students entering the UC system – many of whom have above 4.0 GPAs, multiple AP classes and numerous extracurriculars on their resumés – require remediation before being reaching the academic standard for college freshmen, it is possible that the continued push for academic success earlier may not even increase students' preparedness for good jobs and quality of life later.

Success in school ought to translate to success in the real world. There are a wide variety of competencies that can define success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some are already taught in schools, some are not. These are several, compiled from multiple sources, that many agree are essential to the emergence of a capable, motivated and innovative generation [2, 3].

- 1) Content understanding. We as a nation acknowledge the importance of learning history; of reading great literature; of understanding the ways science can help explain our world, regardless of whether we choose a profession in one of these fields. This canon of knowledge is frequently prioritized and is often well taught in schools.
- 2) Critical and creative thinking. Critical thinking is necessary to complete a large number of conventional exercises such as problem sets and expressing ideas in essay form, but rarely involves real, relevant and complex problems of the sort that we face every day in our world.

Creative thinking may be useful in solving traditional problems in different ways, but its use is not supported or required in most schools.

- 3) Capacity for self-management. Self-reliance and independence are not well fostered by filling out worksheets. Schools that incorporate student-organized projects often position their students well for future success in meeting the innovative demands of our global economy.
- 4) Communication. We are fortunate in the 14<sup>th</sup> congressional district to have fantastic journalism programs in some schools that emphasize the importance of both finding and creating good information. This skill is increasingly crucial to using the plethora of available media sources efficiently and productively.
- 5) Collaboration and leadership. In traditional school environments, this skill often comes from sports or extracurricular activities. The social experience inherent in schools also helps to develop this competency, but we do not often get an opportunity to collaborate on academic pursuits.
- 6) Cultural and social fluency. This competency frequently comes from the study of foreign languages and current events, as well as cross-cultural experiences like travel, but is significantly undervalued in most traditional schools.

Government efforts like Race to the Top [5] may be important to raise the test scores of the lowest-performing schools, but such programs do not address the larger issue. Our nation's education system is falling short of adequately preparing our students for a global 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. If we as a nation aim to remain a viable economic competitor – not just in 2011, but in 2050 – we have a lot of work to do, and government can help.

1. The Common Core content standards required for entry into the Race to the Top program represent an important first step in building some of the six competencies into a common set of standards that individual states can adopt (42 have so far [1]). They can also help to alleviate the complexities of having 50 different standards in 50 different states, which represents a significant waste of government funds at a state level. If states had more closely correlated high-quality standards, costs of writing state-specific texts and curriculum materials that are frequently passed on to public school textbook purchasers could be decreased, saving government funds. However, the available Core standards in math and language arts inadequately develop some of the standards, while leaving others out entirely. In encouraging future common content standards among states, especially through competitive grants like Race to the Top, the legislature could encourage improvement of Common Core standards to include more of the essential competencies and subject areas.
2. The government has already funded two consortia of states that are working on developing more formative and interim assessments of learning. Eventually, the type of high-stakes summative assessments

mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act could be phased out in favor of these formative assessments, which measure more specific skill development throughout the learning process, rather than at the end of a unit, semester, or school year.

3. Real change in education is impossible without changes in professional development, teaching practices and techniques. The government, as it has done in the past, can organize competitive grants to schools that choose to invest in developing their staffs' ability to teach in methods that engage students. Project-based learning is a prime example of this, as well as courses of study that develop student understanding of content to the degree that it will be useful in their future careers. The government can also aid in composing repositories of exemplary projects that teachers across the country can incorporate into their own classroom plans.

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# Civil Rights

## ***Protecting the First Amendment Rights of All: Extending the Federal Equal Access Act to Middle Schools***

*Simone Seiver*

### **Background**

The melding of state and church has always been a contentious issue. Provisions in the Constitution prevent the Federal government from establishing a national religion or infringing on the free exercise thereof. Presidents have run campaigns whose cornerstones are based on religion. Supreme Court nominees have not passed the confirmation process due to their religious beliefs. And most recently, we have seen the elections of our legislative bodies be heavily influenced by the religions of the candidates. As so much as it has been abolished from our Federal government, religion effects a broad and certain impact on the functioning of our nation. One part of our national infrastructure that has been the center of religious debate is our educational system. Allowing students to express their religions freely while also maintaining a nonsectarian school environment has spurred tension surrounding clubs that wish to promote religious study or other independent interests. In response to the escalating issue, Congress passed the Federal Equal Access Act in 1984, which has established “a limited open forum” for student-led, special interest, non-curriculum clubs to function in federally-funded secondary schools. (1) Participation in the clubs must be voluntary and led only by student members of the secondary school, not of citizens within the broader community. The schools are permitted under the law to regulate the locations and times of when the club can convene, although agents of the school may not sponsor, promote, or regularly attend the clubs in any capacity. The effects of the legislation are clear. The number of Christian Bible study clubs has risen from 100 in 1980 to more than 25,000 in 2008. (2) At Gunn high school, students have formed a number of clubs whose existence would otherwise be in jeopardy without the law; the Jewish club and Gay Straight Alliance are protected under the law. The law has been cited in numerous court cases wherein students have challenged the decisions of school administrators to deny the formation of certain clubs. The tremendous importance of the law is two-fold; it protects the rights of students who wish to exercise their religion freely in the educational setting, while also placing reasonable limitations on the expression so that those who choose not to engage in the religious activities are never coerced to do so. Congresswoman Eshoo’s long support of religious freedom places her in a position of power to extend the law to middle school students, a measure necessary to protect the rights of all adolescent students. The Board urges Congresswoman Eshoo to consider the problems associated with limiting the law to secondary school students and to take the necessary actions needed to extend the bill to middle school students enrolled in federally-funded educational institutions.

## **Problems**

The issues associated with The Equal Access Act do not find their basis in the content or the wording of the law, but rather in its limitation as applicable only to secondary schools. Clubs in middle schools, which include Jordan and Terman in Palo Alto, are not afforded the same protections as secondary schools under The Equal Access Act. The exclusion is not coincidental; Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), co-sponsor of the legislation, held that middle school students are too susceptible to religious coercion and thus would be adversely affected by the law. (3) The flaw in this reasoning is that with choice, coercion becomes less probable. Middle school students would have a variety of clubs from which to engage in, or if they choose, to abstain from. A variety of interests, some religious and political, others not, would provide the students a more enriched curriculum, not a coercive learning environment. Another problem associated with the limitations is that middle school students are entering secondary schools without any experience in participating in special interest clubs. As a result, clubs in secondary schools have lower participation, as students are either unaware of their existence or are concerned with participating in an unfamiliar activity. Students who participate in special interest clubs from an early age are able to supplement their in-class learning experiences with discussion in smaller group environments. Further, students are able to carry interests with them from the middle school years through secondary school. In limiting the law to secondary school students, middle school facilities and resources are being under-utilized; special interest clubs could make use of school classrooms, gathering areas, and the like. The clubs would place little financial or logistical burden on school districts. (3) (4) Perhaps the final and most grave problem associated with the limitations placed on the law is that middle schools students are citizens of the United States of America entitled to “equal protection under the law”(5); the basis for not extending the Equal Access Act to middle schools is ill-founded, and therefore, middle school students should be entitled to the same rights conferred in the law. Ultimately, what this issue comes down to is whether parents and students will be able to make educational and special interest choices jointly, or if the federal government will limit the choices by not explicitly protecting special interest clubs in middle schools.

## **Solution**

The Equal Access Act (1984) needs to be amended so that special interest clubs, given that the supporting school is federally-funded and has a limited forum established, can form and function in middle schools. Repealing the act is an unnecessary measure, as the premise of the legislation and its wording are all in good-faith. Two stipulations need to be clearly outlined in the amendment in the application of the law to middle schools. First, given that middle school students may be less-equipped or tentative in forming clubs, parents and other community members should be permitted to play a greater roll in the functioning of the clubs. Second, the amendment should make clear that these clubs may not meet during the school day, but only prior to the first class of the day or after the last class of the day. With these additional provisions, the application of the original law to middle schools will create rich learning experiences in schools across America and

will facilitate the exploration of special interests by middle schoolers in safe and non-coercive environments.

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## ***Freedom of Speech, Expression, and Press***

*Tyler Finn*

### **Background**

The application of freedom of speech, expression and press in America's educational system has been addressed a multitude of times by the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has ruled that students have the right not to speak, specifically, the right not to salute the flag (*West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624 (1943)), and to use certain offensive words and phrases to convey political messages (*Cohen v. California*, 403 U.S. 15 (1971)). However, it has also been ruled that these freedoms do not include the right to incite actions that would harm others, such as shouting 'fire' in a crowded theatre, (*Schenck v. United States*, 249 U.S. 47 (1919)), to make or distribute obscene materials (*Roth v. United States*, 354 U.S. 476 (1957)) or to make an obscene speech at a school-sponsored event (*Bethel School District #43 v. Fraser*, 478 U.S. 675 (1986)), to advocate illegal drug use at a school-sponsored event (*Morse v. Frederick*, \_\_ U.S. \_\_ (2007)), and do not include the right to burn draft cards as an anti-war protest (*United States v. O'Brien*, 391 U.S. 367 (1968)).

Furthermore, there have been three Supreme Court rulings that have set important precedents, the implications of which were vast. In *Tinker v. Des Moines* (393 U.S. 503 (1969)), the court ruled that students have the right to wear black armbands to school to protest war. This ruling defended the student's right to freedom of expression and freedom of speech through an action. Justice Fortas for the majority said of the ruling, "It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." In *Texas v. Johnson* (491 U.S. 397 (1989)) and *United States v. Eichman* (496 U.S. 310 (1990)) a student's right to engage in symbolic speech, such as the burning of a flag in protest, was upheld. Although these cases were nationally watched and extremely controversial, the court again upheld the first amendment rights. Finally, in *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (484 U.S. 260 (1983)), the court held that freedom of speech and press did not permit students to print articles in a school newspaper over the objections of the school administration. The court ruled that, "Educators do not offend the First Amendment by exercising editorial control over the style and content of student speech in school-sponsored expressive activities, so long as their actions are reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns."

### **Problem**

There continue to be isolated incidents across the United States in which students and school administrators clash over the extent of these rights. High school journalism programs continue to run into administrators who refuse to approve articles, and students often incur punishments for refusing to follow dress codes. The lines on which freedom of speech, press and expression must be sacrificed are fuzzy at best and faculty must often use discretion. When they make a wrong decision the consequences for their school or district can be enormous.

The number of incidents in a year that are brought to court is not insignificant. These cases have an impact on the school or district financially, often costing millions in lawyer fees. This leads to “defensive teaching” on the part of teachers and administrators, which can include ignoring misbehavior in order to avoid lawsuits. In a 2004 Harris poll 82% of public school teachers and 77% of principals said they practice “defensive teaching”.

### **Solution**

This is a complex issue that is almost entirely affected by an administration’s or faculty’s use of discretion or lack thereof. There is no solution to this problem that is all encompassing, but progress can be made.

Congress should pass a resolution that solidifies support for student’s constitutional rights. Furthermore, the resolution should recognize that constitutional rights are not handed out at age sixteen like a drivers license, nor eighteen like the right to vote. These rights are unalienable and come with birth. Faculty must realize that they are not dealing with those who have lesser rights and must treat student’s rights as just as sacred as their own.

However, the resolution should also recognize that faculty’s claims often have merit. Action should always be taken against those who abuse these rights. The resolution should urge faculty to always use discretion when dealing with a student’s constitutional rights.

To make progress on this problem much must be done. After the resolution, more action needs to be taken. A study should be ordered on “constitutionally-defensive” teaching, in order to fully understand the affect and cost of these practices on students and faculty. Solutions can be garnered from this data that will prove invaluable in addressing “constitutionally-defensive” teaching. The next time an education bill on the scale of No Child Left Behind is passed, an amendment should be put on that protects these rights. The amendment should require that all schools receiving federal funding agree to support student’s freedoms of speech, press and expression. Having this support in writing will be of great comfort not only to the students but also to the administrators. Both will realize that the responsibility to protect these rights is a shared one, and they, together, must defend something so sacred.



# Administration and Faculty

## ***Race to the Top: Preserving Teacher Quality from California to the New York Islands***

*Alex Mabanta*

### **Introduction**

In 1857, Thomas W. Valentine founded an association made to strengthen national unity in American public schools: the National Education Association (NEA).<sup>9,5</sup> Since its inception, the NEA granted minority nonwhite educators union membership. By the turn of the century, the NEA became one of the staunchest supporters of women's rights: electing a woman as President of the union in 1910- a decade before the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Unlike any other union in the era, the NEA campaigned for civil rights and condemned racial segregation in public schools throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Keeping these distinctions in mind, one must face the fact that today the NEA has made decisions that have negatively affected millions of American students and communities nationwide.

### **Problem**

The National Education Association is currently the largest labor union in the United States; it commands a membership of 3.2 million individuals and a spending budget of \$307 million.<sup>8</sup> Along with the second largest national teachers union, the American Federation of Teachers, the NEA represents over 90% of all public school teachers.<sup>2</sup> The issue that comes into focus is the national degradation of education standards in public schools. In the words of education reformer, Michelle Rhee, "the U.S. is currently 21st, 23rd, and 25th among 30 developed nations in science, reading, and math, respectively. The children in our schools today will be the first generation of Americans who will be less educated than the previous generation."<sup>8</sup> Serving as the chancellor of the Washington DC public school district from 2008 to 2010, Rhee began her breakneck education reform entering the worst performing school district in the country. She noted the lack of a strong teacher evaluation system- a system she radically replaced by efficiently removing underperforming teachers. Her plans consisted of directly challenging and reducing the strength of teachers unions on students, parents, and administrators. Teachers unions have notoriously been able to insulate underperforming teachers from being terminated. For administrators, the burden on firing teachers is higher than retaining them: according to Stanford Professor Terry Moe, "on average it takes two years, \$200,000 and 15 percent of the principal's time to get one bad teacher out of the classroom. As a result, principals don't even try. They give 99 percent of teachers satisfactory evaluations."<sup>1</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Professor Moe's findings have been repeated in many states across the country. In California, teachers must only complete a two year probationary period before being granted tenure- a lifetime status that keeps teachers in almost permanent employment.<sup>5</sup> According to Times magazine, "in New York, school authorities are forbidden, by state law, to evaluate teachers by

student test results.” Coupled with the three year probationary period in locations such as New York City, “in New York [state], it is nearly impossible to fire a teacher — even one accused of a crime, drug addiction or flagrant misbehavior.<sup>6</sup> At full pay, for years, [teachers are merely relegated to another area of school] while the union pleads their cases.” The majority of districts across the country have no systematic teacher evaluation process to ensure the quality of teaching. In other words, teachers have a free hand to teach as efficiently or as poorly as they choose. California and New York operate on a first-in, last-out basis where untenured new teachers are more expendable than those already within the system regardless of teacher quality in conjunction with student performance.<sup>4</sup> It is due to the fact that bad teachers can affect the lives of hundreds of students poorly over the course of their lifetime career that the tenure status must be put under speculation. While teachers unions have acknowledged the national degradation of education, they vehemently oppose changes to tenure or reforms to teacher firing and hiring policy. Also, although they have advocated peer review and teacher self-regulation in deterring underperformance, the system at large remains progressively worse.<sup>10</sup>

## **Solutions**

Reforming teacher quality nationwide requires large restructuring of current statutes. Several changes must be made at all levels of government in order to dramatically increase teacher productivity. On the federal level, the Board advocates changes to the Department of Education as well as the No Child Left Behind Act.

For example, the No Child Left Behind Act, requires that all teachers be “highly qualified”, state-certified and competent in the subjects they teach. The issue with the words “highly qualified” is that it does not adequately provide for a system that ensures productivity. Rather, the inclusion of the word “effective” into the definition of teachers in the No Child Left Behind Act will allow for states to develop a system to monitor the progress of teacher productivity.<sup>4</sup>

The Board also recommends increasing Congressional funding to the Department of Education by 10% over the next ten years. The federal government supports less than 9% of the cost of public education, the rest of which is chained to state funding. By pulling American schools towards a federal program- a greater number of teachers and unions can be addressed by national institutions. For example, President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s “Race to the Top” program has allotted federal funding to states which implemented teacher evaluation reforms in line with program goals.<sup>6</sup> These goals have included adopting performance reviews, implementing teacher training and preparation programs, and providing advancement for aspiring teachers (unlike glass-ceiling tenure which compromises qualified teachers from seeking better positions). Across the country, “Race to the Top” has been appraised as a highly effective answer to the education problem.<sup>9</sup> This board recommends an increase in “Race to the Top” funding as outlined in Obama’s annual Fiscal Year Budget Request from \$4.35 billion<sup>6</sup> to \$5 billion- thereby increasing the efficacy of the program and the amount of schools that could receive funding for reform.

Finally, charter schools- some of which hire and fire teachers based on merit- must be strengthened. Charter school teachers, unlike public school teachers, are

not legally included under the same state statutes for tenure or job retention. Increasing funding for charter schools, one of “Race to the Top’s” goals, has already seen progress in sustaining national charter school institutions such as the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP).<sup>6</sup> KIPP has already seen rebounds in student achievement output because of increased teacher productivity: after one year in the program, test scores in mathematics climbed 29% and in reading 22%.<sup>7</sup> This direct correlation to combat the sagging education standards serves as a logical foundation to continue effective-teacher reforms nationwide. In returning to the story of Michelle Rhee, by adopting a teacher’s evaluation review system she “reversed a trend of declining enrollment... for the first time in 41 years. [Remarkably,] the D.C. schools went from being the worst performing on the National Assessment of Educational Progress examination, the national test, to leading the nation in gains at both the fourth and eighth grade in reading as well as math”.<sup>8</sup> The success of teacher evaluation has undergone numerous tests, but in the end what can be said about reform is best put in Latin: *res ipsa loquitur* (the thing stands for itself). The preponderance of evidence advocating for change fundamentally demonstrates a need to rethink education policy in the United States. For today and for the future, it is of incomparable necessity that every child receives the quality education that he or she deserves.

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## ***Merit-Based Pay for Public School Teachers***

*Claire Fraisl*

### **Introduction**

The public education system in the United States is ineffective, unfair, and broken. American students are not given equal opportunity for a good education and thus, cannot succeed in the real world. In 2006, the Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA, tested fifteen year-old students from across the nation along with students from fifty-one other countries. In science literacy, American students scored, on average, lower than students from twenty-two of the other countries. In mathematical literacy, American students scored lower on average than students from thirty-one of the countries (US Department of Education). America, in order to remain competitive in this global economy, must reform its public education system. Each and every student of our nation deserves a quality education.

### **Problem**

A crucial problem in America's education system is that teachers are neither valued enough nor selected carefully enough. While many public school teachers are dynamic and successful, still many more are undeserving or under qualified for the all-important task of educating the future members of the workforce and future leaders of the nation. While excellent public school teachers of course exist, they are often threatened by tenured and potentially less effective teachers. For example, New Hampshire middle school teacher Christina Hamilton was nominated for the state's Teacher of the Year Award. Despite this incredible accomplishment, she was fired by her school district in lieu of a teacher with more seniority. New Hampshire students deserved this dynamic teacher, but America's ineffective system of hiring and retaining teachers prevented them from reaping the benefits of her teaching (Sager).

Additionally, the American Federation of Teachers has recently banned the practice of surveying students to determine, from the student's perspective, the most dynamic and successful teachers (Sager). Without a stake in their own education, American students will value it less. Without good teachers, the public school system will continue to fail. In New York City in 2007, just 10 out of 55,000 public school teachers, 0.02 percent, were fired for poor performance (Sager). In 1995, one school district in California attempted to fire an ineffective tenured teacher and had over 400 written reasons for her job termination, but only after eight years and \$300,000 were they finally able to maneuver past all of the teacher tenure laws to dismiss this incompetent teacher. (Duke). The same regulations for firing teachers remain in place today. The current system of hiring and firing American public school teachers does not inspire competition between teachers or reward successful teachers for their abilities. America's public education system is broken. We reward teachers solely for seniority and automatically grant them tenure after a certain period of time. This is a major flaw in the American government and must be addressed immediately; our students deserve it.

## **The Reform**

Public school teachers in America should be rewarded based on merit, not seniority. This reform will eliminate ineffective teachers from the school system, result in higher pay for better teachers, and ultimately draw more educated and passionate individuals to teach in American public schools. All of these reforms will benefit American students immensely and vastly improve our education system.

In every other sector of the workforce, employees are hired and fired based on their performance in the position; the public education system should assess teachers on these same grounds. The best way to determine if a teacher is successful or not is to survey those most affected by the teacher's work: the students. All students should be asked to fill out anonymous surveys ranking their teachers' performance. These surveys should have sound categories such as rigor, helpfulness, clarity, and success of teaching style. Student responses should be based on substantial evidence, with ample room for explanations of ratings.

These student surveys will provide a basis for hiring committees, who will further examine and assess teacher performance in all areas. These committees will obviously have the ultimate authority and will hire, fire, and determine compensation for the teachers within the school or entire district, depending on the size of each individual school. The hiring committees will be comprised of a variety of individuals, including district employees, teacher union representatives, and active parents or other members of the community.

Standardized testing results of the teacher's students and accredited evaluators should also be utilized in determining levels of merit based pay for teachers, and multiple avenues of evaluation will ensure that all teachers are being assessed, and thus compensated, fairly.

Teachers will be paid higher salaries depending on their education and success in classrooms, and with more capable teachers receiving higher salaries, more educated and talented professionals will be drawn to teach at public schools. A study conducted by economics professors at the University of Missouri-Columbia and Vanderbilt University found that "student achievement mostly improved when teachers received financial incentives" (University of Missouri-Columbia) and that, according to Professor Podgursky of the University of Missouri: "The preponderance of evidence, when you look at a variety of sources, including the limited number of evaluations and the evidence we have on the variation of teacher effectiveness, suggests that it really is something school districts should be exploring or piloting. Every one of the evaluations has been virtually positive. They all suggest there's a positive response in terms of outcome measures -- including test scores." Merit-based pay is not only theoretically logical, but also scientifically sound.

Recently, President Obama has embraced the idea of merit-based pay for teachers and has also condoned the removal of ineffective teachers in our public school system. Obama also proposes spending federal money to reward excellent teachers in up to 150 school districts in America (Cleveland Leader). The President rightly places a priority on education, and merit-based pay for public school teachers is an important step in improving our school system in the United States. Additionally, the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants (Title II), the Presidential Teaching Fellows, and the Hawkins Center of Excellence are important programs in

driving merit-based compensation for teachers. Only when teachers are rewarded for success in the classroom rather than years in the system will students benefit from a plethora of talented teachers. We must motivate more talented teachers to the public school system, and merit-based pay is the single way to achieve this essential landmark.

## ***Teachers Unions – A Holistic Perspective***

*Rohan Bopardikar*

Information: Teacher unions are one of the most controversial aspects of education today. While unions take steps to improve learning resources, they are often blamed for making it difficult for incompetent teachers to be fired. This dichotomy is one of the most momentous issues facing education policymakers in the status quo.

The American Prospect writes that teacher union's "collective bargaining increase[s] wages, attracting higher-caliber candidates." Louis J. Pantuosco of the Journal of Education furthers that teacher unions, "lobby for smaller class sizes, [...] compensation packages to attract and retain better quality teachers, and greater classroom resources of technology and supplies," ultimately increasing student achievement. With higher quality teachers, more resources, and smaller class sizes, teacher unions are the ticket to better education for America's children. Their efforts have proven instrumental to ensure that students are learning more in a better environment. This conclusion is affirmed by a BusinessWeek study conducted across all 50 states, which says that empirically, teacher unions focus on creating policies that benefit the classroom and therefore have improved learning overall. Randal Eberts of the W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research quantifies this impact. In a comparative analysis of unionized versus nonunionized districts, he found that teacher unions improve SAT and ACT scores by 4.5%, and increase high school graduation rates by 4.4%. In these ways, teacher unions give our country's youth a better education.

Therefore, the impact of unions on American education in the status quo is positive, meaning that if unions were to be left alone it would not result in any negative affects on the learning system.

However, it is always possible to improve upon the current situation. As such, it is important to note that problems exist. Professor Terry Moe of the Journal of Political Science writes specifically that "contract rules [from unions] make it difficult or impossible to weed out mediocre teachers [thereby] undermin[ing] the most important determinant of student learning: teacher quality." Ineffective teachers are one of the most pressing obstacles to learning today, and the system must be reformed effectively to deal with the situation.

Solution: It is imperative to recognize that the negative impact of ineffective teachers does not stem from one source. It may be true that tenured teachers are untouchable, but in order to thoroughly understand the situation, one must both consider all aspects of the system that perpetuate the problem and engage in a comparative analysis of their contributions. The Economic Policy Institute concludes, "Schools today are under-administered. Frequently, one principal supervises as many as 30 teachers. No principal can evaluate and mentor this many. In addition to teacher evaluation, principals are handling curriculum, scheduling, student discipline, parent and community relations, and supervision of buildings

and grounds.” This problem is non-unique to the educational atmosphere insofar as that any job discipline would crumble under similar circumstances. The article continues, “No other profession operates with such inadequate supervision. Can you imagine a nursing supervisor overseeing 30 nurses? A newspaper editor overseeing 30 reporters? A law firm partner overseeing 30 associates? Even an assembly line can't rely on only one foreman for 30 workers.” At that point “[t]he failure of public education to organize itself around this common-sense principle is the roadblock to fair and balanced evaluation. Blaming teacher unions for this failure is demagoguery.”

Without being able to identify the failing teachers, the question of whether or not one can remove them is irrelevant. In fact, the tenure problem is not as big of a deal as much of the literature makes it out to seem. Rather, all the blame for being unable to fire incompetent teachers gets pinpointed onto unions, but at the point where a simple analysis as to why these teachers still educate students reveals a much different and larger problem, the steps that need to be taken to improve the education system should be reevaluated.

Therefore, policy makers should pass legislation that mandates and potentially gives the public school system the means to hire teacher evaluators to ensure that students in America are receiving a quality education. The specifics are in fact quantifiable and a fair job description can be outlined.

The EPI writes that the “[e]valuation of teachers, including the mentoring of novices and of veterans in need of improvement, requires the employment of many additional supervisors of teachers.” Such individuals would be trained in the art of gauging teacher performance and effectiveness, whereas today’s “principals have no time (or training) to do it right.” The ratio of evaluators to teachers has been determined, as “[m]anagement theorists recommend that no leader should have more than 5 direct-reports.”

The specifics on funding are difficult to quantify. However, operating under aforementioned ratio, basic supply and demand economics should yield an appropriate market equilibrium wage that will translate into the amount of additional funding Congress would have to allocate to the education system.

Furthermore, it is imperative that these evaluators are not formally labeled as teachers, so that their job description does not enable them to join teacher unions. Legally, any worker cannot be prevented from joining a union, but privatizing this specific industry of evaluators would likely solve for that potential harm of job collusion, as teacher unions are a part of the public-sector.

While one may raise the concern that unions will still prevent the teachers from being fired after they have been identified, unions will not resist proposals wherein “two core elements of due process” are retained. “First, [one] must be able to demonstrate to a hearing officer that the teacher's weaknesses had been identified,



that the teacher had been notified of those weaknesses, and that the teacher had been given the opportunity (with appropriate mentoring, if necessary) to correct them. Second, [one] must be able to demonstrate that other, similarly-situated teachers, were treated similarly: he wasn't using the weakness as a pretext for arbitrary discipline while other teachers with similar weaknesses were ignored. Meeting both of these conditions requires an intensity of oversight and observation of instruction that is impossible to achieve with existing supervisory ratios, except in the most extreme cases of gross incompetence." These two criteria are actually quite reasonable and, if integrated into the job of evaluators, would solve for the problem of incompetent teachers.

## ***The Practice of Academic Tenure in Schools***

*Charles Cantrell*

### **Background**

Academic tenure is defined commonly as “status granted to an employee, usually after a probationary period, indicating that the position or employment is permanent.” It was originally instituted to allow professors to teach freely and protect them from dissenting from the popular opinion or theory, allowing new ideas to flow without the stress of being unconventional and risking a career. Born in universities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has now spread to almost every level of education but has remained essentially the same throughout its history. Tenure requires a probationary period in which the candidate is evaluated for performance. This period can be anywhere from two years, like Los Altos High School, to the conventional seven years at the university level. After the allotted time, the candidate is either let go or given tenure and is protected from dismissal from the position.

### **Issue**

At Los Altos High, during the probationary period the candidate must qualify as an excellent teacher or staff member, and pass periodic administration evaluations. During these two years there is great incentive to work hard and keep the position until granted tenure. After the two years however, and tenure has been granted, teachers are not re-evaluated periodically for tenure unless numerous complaints are filed or a behavioral or professional misconduct incident occurs. The issue lies in the utter lack of incentive to retain all previous teaching qualities after tenure has been granted. Upon receiving tenure staff knows their employment is near permanent and no longer need to perform as they did when they were undergoing evaluation. Though administration witnesses teachers slowly becoming less and less motivated, they can do nothing but relay complaints from parents and students. Furthermore administrators are less willing to approach tenured teachers fearing that it will cause trouble with no beneficial result. Many tenure policies do not explicitly define the “just cause” required to terminate a teacher in turn leaving the administration in the tough spot of defining what “just cause” there is to recommend termination. In a report from 2005 done by the Miller Canfield Law Firm the board finds that of the academic tenure policies examined none explicitly discussed the evaluation of post tenure performance nor did any include a clause about the student performance. It seems that there is little incentive for school districts to change their previous policies and remove the teachers who do not perform to standard, hopefully with the help of new legislation this will soon change.

### **Suggested Solution**

The board does not propose academic tenure is removed entirely but just regulated closer and focused more on post tenure performance as opposed to granting tenure and ensuring job security no matter what the performance may be. Congresswoman Eshoo could put forward legislation that called for the reform of

tenure policies (primarily those in the secondary and elementary levels), and gave incentive to districts that adopted new policies which move away from the traditional forms of tenure and towards policies that include more regular evaluation and a less permanent status of employment. Similar to providing tax breaks to corporations that are becoming “greener” the House could create a budget designed to support progressive districts through grants or tax breaks. The board understands that there are state and even local laws that prevent federal legislation to have any effect on their schools however; an incentive program seems to be the most effective way to promote change.

# Technology

## ***Technology Education***

*Neil Kumar*

### **Background**

Technology has continuously improved over the last couple of decades, bringing with it many opportunities for students. These opportunities include many forms of websites, devices, and tools which can facilitate learning by presenting new methods through which students can absorb content. For example, the internet has provided a revolutionary system in which a student can find information, explore varying viewpoints, and do a multitude of other activities that can all present new data to the student in different forms. Thousands of websites like Google or Yahoo! provide exceptional links to other sites which foster additional content that had been previously undiscovered. This process of going from one domain to another can lead to topics different from the original, but it is this search of knowledge which cultivates a sense of learning in a student. Studies indicate that children who use the internet show gains in cognitive abilities such as memory, spatial and logical problem solving, critical thinking, concentration, abstraction and comprehension. Other devices like laptops and cell phones have increased efficiency for menial tasks by shortcutting outdated methods and allowing greater interaction between people.

Ultimately, our society as we know it would not function as fundamentally cohesive or as intellectually stimulated without technological innovations. Students would not be able to explore the various realms of studies before them as extensively. And most importantly, we would not be on the academic level to which our society currently stands, for we would not be able to access the plethora of information that technology provides. Therefore, it is extremely imperative for today's students to receive sufficient education in utilizing such technologies properly.

### **Problem**

In an era where so much learning occurs electronically, not enough is being done by our government and school systems in properly educating students in the technologies. Currently, the School Improvement Program of the state of California allocates \$100,000 annually to teaching first and second grade students basic electronic usage. Other programs like CTAP, or the California Technology Assistance Program, provide greater funding for eleven districts within California, but recent cuts dealt a considerable blow to its efficacy. The program itself is innovative and involves order in its programs, but the cuts are weakening its abilities. Also, many programs like CTAP give such funding based on merit, unfairly leaving other low-scoring schools with fewer opportunities.

The No Child Left Behind program states that many of its participating teachers are "on their way" to becoming "highly developed" professionals in the technological fields, which is not a reassuring fact considering the importance of teachers to students' learning. Many tenured teachers are being asked to provide

such technological teaching to students as well, which presents the problem that some older teachers who are not technologically oriented might be asked to do so. Although the national government has increased classroom technology funding by \$5 billion annually for the last fifteen years, studies indicate that teachers don't utilize it as proficiently as possible. They normally integrate technology a few times a week into their lessons less than 20% of the time, and 50% of teachers do not use technology at all.

Overall, these problems indicate many aspects in which the current system of educating students about technology is in great need of change. Increased efforts must be taken by teachers and programs alike in providing the proper experience necessary to produce informed students. In this modern world, an ability to utilize these technological opportunities proves an invaluable asset.

### **Solution**

Because technology plays such a significant role in students' lives today, greater efforts must be taken in properly educating them at a younger age so that they can carry such information through their lives. The federal government should play a larger part in helping the students. Incentives like slight pay increases should be given to teachers who utilize technology in various ways in the classroom. Additionally, the government should seek to hire more highly trained professionals from engineering and other well-versed backgrounds to inculcate their first-hand experience in the programs. A national system like that of CTAP could prove useful on a national level if costs are kept down and a curriculum like that in California is widely adopted. Such plans involve high costs, so to cover these payments a higher portion of the taxes that citizens pay should be placed within the technological sector of education.

Regarding the curriculum of this education, the Student Advisory Board suggests that teachers take a three-fold approach to instilling their technological expertise. First, teachers should focus on teaching students how to utilize the Internet by giving examples of websites that provide needed help. For example, teachers should lead students to various internet databases which are both secure and reliable like *Jstor* or *The Encyclopedia Britannica*. Additionally, students should be warned of the dangers that certain sites harbor. Second, students should be introduced to many of the data-processing programs that are used later in life. Many Microsoft products like Microsoft Word, Excel, or PowerPoint provide great methods of relaying information in informative, professional ways. Nearly all fields of work involve using these products, and so it is extremely helpful in the life of a student to know how to use them when necessary. At this stage in learning, the national government could make a deal with private tech companies to buy a mass number of products for cheaper rates and for wide distribution. Finally, the third part of the education involves utilizing technology alongside non-technological areas of study. If a student is doing a project that involves gathering data, they should know how to provide computerized graphs and add information that was found from external sources. This sector of learning primarily involves knowing how to draw upon various areas of study and piece them together using technological resources.

As members of the 14<sup>th</sup> Congressional district, we have all seen the extent to which technology has rapidly developed around us. Debates arise over whether these changes are positive or not, but it is imperative to note that society is transforming and education is following a similar pattern. Finally, we understand that in a time when the next big thing could lead a revolution in the way we interact and understand information, students should be able to adapt to that change and thrive accordingly.

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## High-tech Educational Devices

Leah Worthington

### Background

In today's educational system, Smartboards have begun to replace traditional whiteboards, and iPads are the new portable computers, complete with thousands of educational "apps" for interactive learning programs.<sup>15</sup> In some ways, the technological upsurge in schools can be seen as the virtual digitalization of the classroom experience. Textbooks and paperback books may soon become a rarity in light of new devices such as Kindles, iPads and even MP3 players, which allow students to download and listen to their reading material. Typically, these new technological devices are used in one of two ways: either to upgrade traditional methods of educating and sharing information or to encourage creative thinking and problem-solving within schools. However, as the outsourcing of our industry to foreign nations increases, the use of technology in America has begun to head more in the direction of innovation and design. As a result, improving younger students' technological fluency and introducing them to the use of hands-on technological devices has become much more important in the education system.

### Problems

One main obstacle that schools face in attempting to integrate more advanced technologies into their schools is funding. In order for a product such as an iPad to be considered cost-effective, it must be affordable, useful, easy to operate and sustainable. Schools must consider not only the initial cost of purchase but also the installment, maintenance, and repair costs of an electronic device. If monetary costs outweigh the benefits of introducing a new device into a school, the district is unlikely to approve the purchase, especially without strong evidence of its effectiveness in improving the quality of students' education.

Another factor schools must consider is the ease of introducing the device and the transition period required to alter the curriculum to incorporate the new technology. While some changes, such as upgrading old desktops to new laptops, are relatively painless, others, such as replacing whiteboards with Smartboards may require an installment period, a training period for the teachers and other modifications. Though some schools have started to launch all-iPad math and science courses, others are less enthusiastic about developing new curriculums and dedicating time to training the students and teachers to use and care for such expensive electronics. And while some teachers argue that the new technology has helped continue education outside of school, others, often those without the right support or training, simply find it burdensome.

In speaking with Professor Paulo Blikstein of the Stanford Education and Research department, I learned that many teachers are also struggling to use new technological devices in innovative, design-oriented ways rather than adapting them

<sup>15</sup> Winnie Hu, "Math That Moves: Schools Embrace the iPad", <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/05/education/05tablets.html> (January 2011)

to fit an “existing mindset.” According to Blikstein, schools tend to use new technology to practice and test basic skills—rather than innovative thought—through traditional standardized tests and lecture-based instruction because “things that are easy to test displace things that are hard to test.” He explained that, in many cases, schools are afraid to launch new technology initiatives because they are unsure of how to “take things to scale” and make their programs effective on a larger scale.

### **Suggestions**

Some public schools in Chicago have begun to tackle the problem of funding by applying for district-financed iPad grants, while in Virginia, the Department of Education began a \$150,000 iPad initiative and began to replace biology and history textbooks in over ten schools.<sup>16</sup> We encourage the Congresswoman to support the distribution of such technology-neutral grants and technological initiatives to help schools get the funds they need to upgrade the technology available to their students. In order to gain support, we suggest that Congress offer incentives in the form of tax breaks to companies that invest in the development of new devices and research to prove their effectiveness in improving students’ more sophisticated skills including innovative thinking and problem-solving.

Another solution, one that Professor Blikstein himself tested in less affluent schools in Brazil, is to use less expensive, even recycled materials to create more cost-effective versions of devices such as acidity-sensors for chemistry classes.<sup>17</sup> Though this requires more work and creativity on the part of the school, it can save money and train teachers and their students not to rely on quick fixes but to think critically and find their own solutions. This type of problem-solving practice better prepares students for the professional world while teaching them to become more personally involved in their schoolwork. We suggest that the Congresswoman help establish organizations to collect and distribute used materials to schools in want of better technology but in need of financial aid. Perhaps these programs could also connect such schools with professors at local universities who could assist the teachers in developing their own recycled devices.

In order to make the transition to more advanced technological devices, schools need to build their teachers’ and students’ trust in the devices from the beginning. We believe it would be beneficial to include an introductory component in programs like the Virginia iPad initiative that help the students become acquainted with the new technology so they feel capable of experimenting and exploring their possibilities. We also agree with Professor Blikstein’s suggestion to develop more gender-neutral after-school, technological innovation programs

<sup>16</sup> Winnie Hu, “Math That Moves: Schools Embrace the iPad”, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/05/education/05tablets.html> (January 2011)

<sup>17</sup> Paulo Blikstein, “Technology as a Trojan Horse in School Environments”. [http://alumni.media.mit.edu/~paulo/publications/academic/paulo\\_blikstein\\_trojan\\_icl2002.pdf](http://alumni.media.mit.edu/~paulo/publications/academic/paulo_blikstein_trojan_icl2002.pdf) (October 2002)



where students are encouraged to experiment with more advanced devices that allow them to develop programs, design products, or simply improve their technological fluency.

## ***Conclusion***

*Emily Ryles*

Nicholas M. Butler, an American philosopher, once said, “America is the best half-educated country in the world.” For the most part, all the members of SAB this year agreed. But for us, being the best half-educated country isn’t nearly good enough when we know we can be the best, completely, and utterly educated country in the universe. As seen by the report created by this year’s board one should not lay awake at night worrying about the future of America for that future will be lead by the authors of this report. The maturity and dedication of this year’s board has been inspiring and the ideas they have created surpass the majority of political leaders around the world. I look forward to watching my peers shape the world into a more educated place and lead our country towards a path of higher learning.

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*Report compiled by Sarah Rosston*